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## NOTES AND COMMENTS.

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### THE MODERN WOMAN AND MARRIAGE.

CRITICISM of the marriage relation is in the air.

The stage concerns itself almost exclusively with that topic for the moment, Ibsen having struck the key to which all the playwrights are pitching their chorus of echo. Every book-stall is heavy with similar discussions in dialogue, carried on by the puppets of fiction.

In what has all this turmoil had its origin; what is the significance of this criticism; and what is the general attitude of woman towards the matter?

Howells, with only humorous apology, admits of his sex that "after 1,800 years man is only imperfectly monogamous."

That even this imperfect measure of self-denial and fidelity has been reached is almost solely due to the untiring effort of the woman of the past.

The root of family life is not mutual affection between man and woman, because that, alas!—whether it be founded on physical attraction or mental affinity—is subject to change. Age withers, and custom stales it: circumstance blights it, a diversity of spiritual growth rends it apart, and no man or woman can say with certainty that it will endure for a life-time. But the fluctuations to which wedded love is subject are unknown to the abnegating instinct of parenthood. Mutual affection for the offspring will hold together the most opposite natures; it will rivet for all existence two lives that must otherwise inevitably spring asunder by instinctive repulsion.

Love of offspring is in man a cultivated emotion; in woman an instinct. There are women lacking the instinct as there are calves born with two heads, but for purposes of generalization these exceptions may be ignored. In many of the lower orders of life the female is obliged to protect the young from the enmity of the male parent. The alligator finds no meal so refreshing as a light lunch off his newly hatched children, and the male swine shares his epicurean taste for tender offspring. The stallion is a dangerous companion for the mare with colt at foot, though it be of his own get, and many species of males appear to experience a similar jealousy of the young while absorbing the attentions of the female. Speaking generally of the animal world the young are obliged to look to the mother entirely for food and care during the period of helplessness. With savage man of the lower grade the paternal instinct is still faint and rudimentary, and even where the woman has, through long ages of endeavor, succeeded in cultivating in the heart of the other parent a fair imitation of her own affection, this affection being a cultivated emotion and not an instinct, frequently breaks down under stress of misbehavior or frowardness on the part of the child.

To this end then—that end "toward which the whole creation moves"—

to effect this result of an equal care and affection for the offspring, all the energies of women have been bent for ages.

She has fought polygamy with incessant hatred; not only for its injury to herself but for its constant menace to her children. The secret strings of the woman's heart are wrapped about the fruit of her own flesh, but the desire of the man is to the woman, and this desire she has used as a lever to work her will—not consciously, perhaps, not with reasoned forethought, but with the iron tenacity of blind instinct. Reasoned will may be baffled or deflected, but water can by no means be induced to run up hill; and so while woman has been apparently as fluidly yielding as water—to be led here and driven there according to the will of her master—she has stuck to her own ends with a silent persistency that has always tired out opposition at last. She has, like Charity, suffered all things, endured all things; she has been all things to all men. She has yielded all outward show of authority; she has submitted to be scoffed at as an inferior creation, to be sneered at for feebleness and shallow-mindedness, to be laughed at for chattering inconsequence, and to be regarded as a toy and trifle to amuse man's leisure hours, or as a dull drudge for his convenience, for ends are not achieved by talking about them. All the ages of masculine discussion of the Eternal Feminine show no reply from her, but to-day the world is a woman's world. Civilization has, under the unrelaxing pressure of endless generations of her persistent will, been bent to her ends. Polygamy is routed, and the errant fancy of the male tamed to yield itself to a single yoke. She has "with bare and bloody feet climbed the steep road of wide empire," but to-day she stands at the top—mistress of the world. Man, with his talents, his strength, and his selfishness, has been tamed to her hand. The sensual, dominant brute with whom she began what Max Nordau calls "the toilsome, slow ascent of the long curve leading up to civilization," stands beside her to-day, hat in hand, her lover—husband; tender, faithful, courteous, and indulgent.

This is the conquest that has been made, the crown and throne achieved by the silent, uneducated woman of the past.

Monogamous marriage is the foundation stone on which has been built her power; a power which, while it has enured to her own benefit, has not been exercised for selfish ends. She has raised the relation between man and herself from a mere contract of sensuality or convenience to a spiritual sacrament within whose limits the purest and most exalted of human emotions find play. For the coarse indulgence and bitter enmities of polygamy has been substituted the happiest of bonds, in which the higher natures find room for the subtlest and completest felicities, and within which the man, the woman and the child form a holy trinity of mutual love and well-being.

To this jewel, so hardly won, so long toiled for, it would be natural to suppose that woman would cling with all the force of her nature; all the more as education broadened her capacity for reflection and deepened her consciousness of self. On the contrary, the little learning she has so far acquired seems, as usual, a dangerous thing, and with the development of self-consciousness the keen, unerring *flair* of her instinct for the one thing needful has been blunted and enfeebled. It is not necessary to give undue weight to the blatant and empty-headed crew who announce marriage to be a failure, and that women are tired of, and will no longer submit to, child-bearing. There are crowing hens in all barnyards, and their loud antics

never materially affect the supply of eggs—but there are other voices more potent and more threatening than these.

A certain class of optimists always pooh-pooh suggestions of possible change, or danger to an existing comfortable state of things, and these will refuse to admit that the modern woman may be risking anything serious, or turning her feet in the wrong direction. But those sensitive to feel and observant to note the mind of their generation will be aware that it is not only the half-baked, shrieking sisterhood who decry the result of so much patient endeavor and self-sacrifice. The theory that marriage is a heavy bond, cramping the capacities of the sex, appears in the most unexpected quarters, held by women of ability and education. That loud cry for “the development of her individuality”—only a euphemistic phrase for the cruel and profligate modern creed, “Every thing pleasant is yours by right: you have no duties”—has an ever increasing chorus of applause among women.

Wonderful, that while knowledge comes, wisdom lingers. Wonderful, that what women have suffered so long to win, once won they should cease to prize; that education should not teach woman that man was by nature very far removed from the gentle domestic animal she knows to-day. However the modern woman may swagger about her individuality, may talk of her “spiritual needs,” and deplore the stupid tyranny of man who demands sacrifices from her in return for his tenderness, protection and support, the *fact* is not changed, that however much she may be man’s intellectual equal, or spiritual superior, the exigencies of motherhood put her at his mercy. She can not be entirely self-dependent except at the cost of the welfare of the offspring. The Factory Acts are a recognition of the right of the child to its mother’s health and vitality. Woman simply may not eat her cake and have it too. Using all her energies for her own needs she can not give vigor to her children. If she employ for her own ends her store of life she robs the child. To adequately supply the new generation with health, brains and nerve force she must husband her resources and yield herself to the generosity and tenderness of the man and trust to his care. That he has not always been generous and tender, that he is not always so even now, does not alter the general fact.

This enmity to and destructive criticism of that fair temple of life called marriage—built by women’s hands out of women’s hearts—seems like a madness. If women pluck down its shrines, man will not be long in refusing to worship there. There might be something, perhaps, to admire in the self-denial and courage of a sex which should say: “We will destroy even this holy sanctuary, built by the ages, in which we are honored priestesses, which contains all our luxuries, our securities, all our comforts; we will go out and face the world and toil like the rest, only that we may be free!” if it were not that women are not and never can be free. They are all under bonds to the new generation.

If she were alone, she might choose to make herself homeless—but how of the little children?

ELIZABETH BISLAND.

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#### POOR CITY BOYS IN THE COUNTRY.

THE average poor city boy thinks of the country as a place where he can do with the fullest freedom what he best likes to do in the city—more specifically as a place where he can play all the ball he pleases, as he pleases,